ARTICLE ON PAGE 14

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
1 October 1986

Questions on the twin 'spy' cases

By Pat M. Holt

THE case of Nicholas Daniloff, the US journalist who was charged with spying in Moscow, not only brings into focus the question of how to deal with Soviet spies in the United States without endangering Americans in the Soviet Union; it also tells us a good deal about the larger question of Soviet-US relations generally.

Look first at Soviet espionage in the United States. It is clear that we cannot tolerate this simply because of the threat of retaliation against Americans in the Soviet Union. That would amount to giving the Soviets a license to spy. In fact, the Soviets have been retaliating for many years. Whenever we have expelled a Soviet diplomat, they have expelled a US diplomat.

The problem is different when there is no diplomatic immunity, as in the case of Gennady Zakharov, the Soviet citizen employed by the United Nations whose arrest in New York apparently triggered the Daniloff arrest in Moscow. When we have arrested nondiplomatic Soviets in the past, the Soviets have arrested nondiplomatic Americans — scholars or businessmen, not journalists — so their behavior in the Zakharov-Daniloff case should have been no great surprise. Past cases have been settled by exchanges. This time US officials vowed there would be no exchange, but there was one (which Secretary of State George Shultz called an "interim measure") to get the two out of jail. This is another illustration of the Reagan administration's propensity to say it is not going to do something and then do it and then deny it has done it.

The people that the FBI should have been worried about were Zakharov's other contacts.

The US could have arrested Mr. Zakharov without sending him to jail; it could even have sent him back to Moscow. This would probably have prompted the expulsion of an American from the Soviet Union — something Mr. Daniloff would no doubt have preferred to what actually happened to him. It would also have upset the Soviet Union a good deal less. Intelligence services get nervous when one of their agents is in jail; they don't know how much he is going to tell his interrogators.

A better way to handle the Zakharov case would have been not to arrest him at all at that time and in those circumstances. Zakharov was caught passing money to and receiving classified documents from an informant of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. But the people the FBI should have been worried about were Zakharov's other contacts. Whom else was Zakharov passing money to? Who else was giving him sensitive data? It is possible that the informant was Zakharov's only source, but this seems unlikely. If it were the case, the FBI did not need to worry about Zakharov at all. If it were not the case, the FBI should have watched Zakharov until he led them to some real spies. It was Zakharov's real sources, if any, who represented a danger to the US. These sources are still unidentified and are still free to peddle whatever information they have to some other Soviet agent.

The Soviet reaction to Zakharov's misfortune illuminates and emphasizes the importance the Soviet government places on equivalency and, more important, on receiving what it regards as proper respect. This frequently leads the Soviets to act as though they have a chip on their shoulder. Indeed they do. The Soviet Union is a legitimate superpower, but it does not feel that it is treated like one, especially by the US.

Soviets are particularly irritated by what they interpret as US condescension — statements, for example, attributing Soviet arms proposals to Soviet economic pressures. The Soviets do have serious economic problems; but so, for that matter, does the US. This is not deterring Washington from spending more on defense. Why does anybody think it would deter Moscow?

Related to this is a Soviet feeling that they are not being taken seriously. The US is negotiating on arms control; but, especially in the Reagan administration, it tends to reject Soviet proposals out of hand. Even if we think some of these proposals are flawed, there is no need to annoy the Soviets by treating them in such a cavalier fashion.

The US is unable or unwilling to see things through Soviet eyes. To Americans, Zakharov is a spy caught by the FBI; Daniloff was an innocent framed by the KGB secret police. A handful of Soviet officials know that Zakharov is a spy (assuming he really is), but many — maybe most — Russians might very well think that Zakharov was framed by the FBI while Daniloff was a spy caught by the KGB.

The Zakharov-Daniloff matter escalated beyond what either government probably intended. But the Soviets used it to make a point. The US-Soviet culture gap (not to mention the ideological gap) is so wide that the course of US-Soviet relations is unlikely ever to be smooth, but it might be less rough if we pay attention.

Pat M. Holt, former chief of staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, writes on foreign affairs from Washington.